

Corrections to *La Reata* for Autumn 1990:

page 2, col.2, line 3: E.N. Wood

page 5, col.1, lines 5-6: By 1912 Paul Elder's book shop has
already dropped from mention...

line 18: casual passer-by.

page 8, col.2, line 30: until the latter left for New York...

line 32: he later served...

page 10, "Notes," 4.: ...Sarkis Shmavonian...

page 11, "Notes," 5.: Wood. p.15

page 12, "Notes," 14.: ...(but earlier known as the Ark Book Shop)
in the Five Points Shopping Center; this shop later
moved to Loreto Plaza, where it remains in business
today.

page 12: photograph, "Exterior, Arts & Crafts Book Shop."

page 13, col.2, lines 26-27: remodeled

page 23: Apr 29 - E.R. Jim Blakley - Spring Roundup...

page 24: Past Sheriffs: E.R. "Jim" Blakley, 1982

Active Memberships: Phyllis Lotz, Calvin & Jean
Goodrich

Corresponding Members: Edwin H. Carpenter

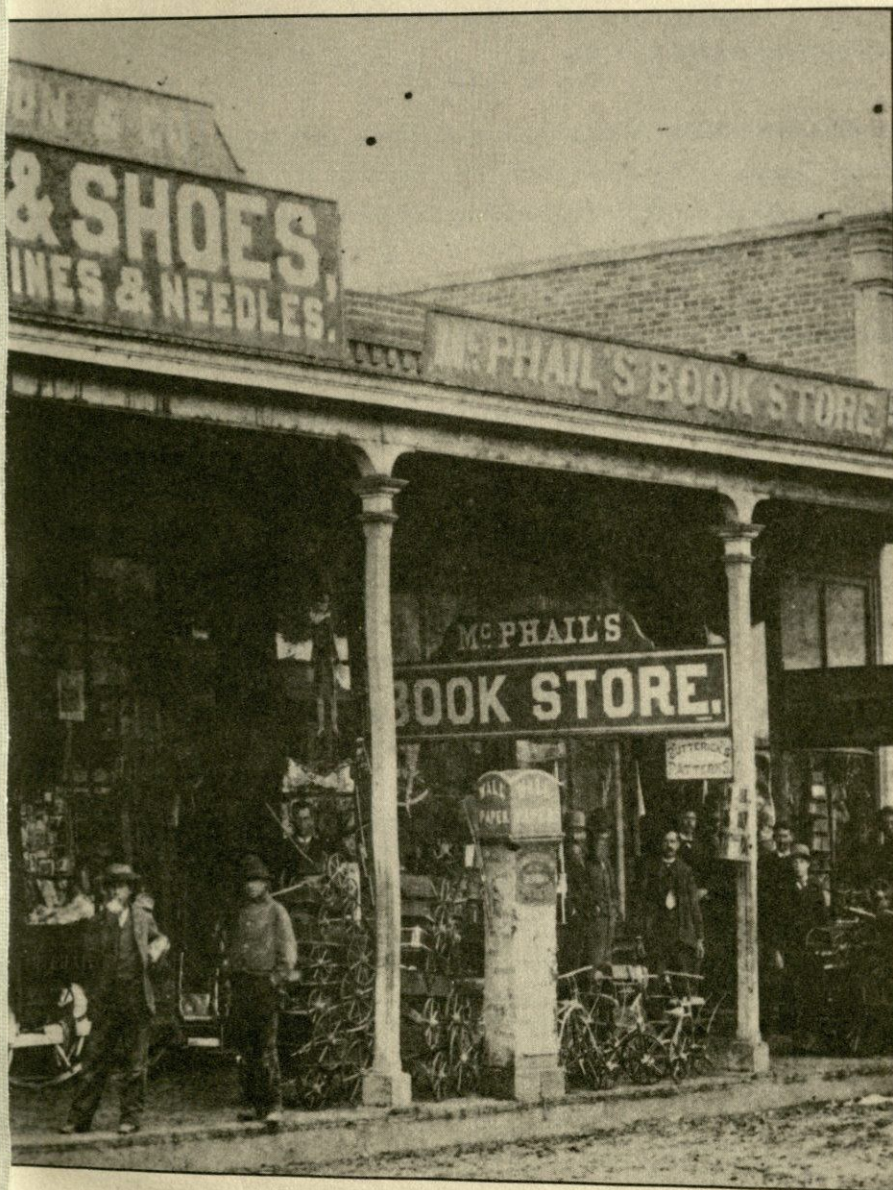


La Reata

SANTA BARBARA CORRAL OF THE WESTERNERS

NUMBER 10

AUTUMN 1990



Bookselling in Santa Barbara

1/16/91
2/11/91
3/28/91
5/2/91
6/3/91

FOR ALL THE BOOKSELLERS AND BOOK STORES that have flourished and struggled in Santa Barbara, there is surprisingly little written about the trade. This issue of *La Reata* presents the first segment of an inventory of the people and places that have helped to provide the written word to Santa Barbara for the past 120 years.

THIS ISSUE ALSO OFFERS a history of The Book Den, written by the proprietor, Eric Kelley. The story of the research behind this history is full of clues, and as good as any Sherlockian tale: a small paper label with an Oakland address, a business card with a unknown signature written across the top; an observation from a casual observer at the Oakland Public Library, "Why don't you see what was at that address the year before," and the incredible discovery of a long-forgotten recorded interview with Max Clemens Richter; the last almost too good to be true.

ERIC EUGENE KELLEY was born in Augsburg, Germany in 1952. In 1967 he moved to Marin County in Northern California, where he received a crash-course in things Californian. He attended the University of California at Los Angeles where he graduated Magna cum Laude, Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film/Television in 1974. Soon after graduation he joined the established bookstore chain of Brentano's. His desire to own and operate a book store eventually brought him to Santa Barbara.

THE EDITOR WISHES TO THANK Roger Boutell for his generous recollections, via telephone, to a complete stranger; David Myrick for his thoughtful suggestions and leads; Michael Redmon for his patience and persistence "in the stacks;" Clif Smith for his librarian's memory and awe-inspiring collection of Santa Barbara-iana; Mrs. Saralou Fenzi Carpenter for her enlightening recollections of Sarah Redfield; Warren Fenzi for graciously sharing his rare photographs of Sarah Redfield's book shop; David Hill for reproducing many of the photographs in this issue on the eve of a two-week fishing trip; Roger Levenson for detective work in the foggy and quaking North and Laurie Costello Johnson for her loving forbearance during this project.



Hassinger & McPhail. Courtesy Clifton F. Smith

Front cover: H.A.C. McPhail's. Courtesy Santa Barbara Historical Society

979,491
52316 (6/18/92 GC) # 24084131

Bookselling in Santa Barbara A Brief Account of the Years 1870-1933

by Charles Johnson

The following introduction represents a work-in-progress, compiling information about the history of bookselling and booksellers in Santa Barbara from origins to the present. Any Westerners having anecdotes, photographs, publications or ephemera relating to this subject are encouraged to contact the editor.

979.491 5231 b (6/18/92 GC) # 24084131

THE BOOK TRADE IN Santa Barbara developed in stages common to many growing towns in California. Advertisements appeared in local newspapers placed by publishers from out of town such as H.H. Bancroft in San Francisco, or from out of state such as Harper Brothers in New York. These advertisements offered books of widespread popularity and personal appeal, for example, *Vick's Flora Guide for 1872*, *Resources of the Pacific Slope*, and *Ladies of the White House*. In these same pages one could often find glowing descriptions of the opportunities awaiting book agents, "100 books sold by agents last week" touted one publisher in the *Santa Barbara Press* for July 2, 1870, although exactly how many agents it took to sell this number was not mentioned. Books evident in nominal quantities on the shelves of merchants such as A.W. Froom, or S.T. Tilley, began to

appear in increasing numbers as demand dictated. Both of these merchants carried a variety of goods besides books including stationery, toys, "notions," musical instruments, pens, stereoscopes, stereoscopic photographs or "views," pocket knives, copy books, blank books, violin and guitar strings and "confectionery," to mention but a portion of the stock (see cover photograph).

Given the typical breadth of offerings listed above, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the first "verifiable" bookseller in Santa Barbara. We do know that when Miss Sarah Plummer arrived from New York in late 1869 or early 1870 to stay at Colonel Bradbury Dinsmore's farm (now the San Ysidro Ranch), she was reported to have been dismayed by the lack of a literary center (she was also reported to have died soon after her arrival from a horse or buggy accident

2
3
5
6
"while she was yet young and promising").¹ The 1870 Census for Santa Barbara supports Miss Plummer's dismal appraisal with nary a mention of bookseller or stationer as a stated vocation.² Miss Plummer proceeded to rectify this situation, in part, by writing to Dr. Harry Bellows, "A Unitarian Minister who sent approximately 200 books along with suggestions for establishing a library."³ She canvassed the town for subscriptions to a Town Library; the cost was \$5 per person. On March 25, 1871, with over four hundred books amassed, Sarah Plummer established the first "Lending Library and Stationery Depot." "Miss Plummer's Library" as it was often referred to, included not only books and paper, but cards, sheet music, writing utensils, artist supplies, school books, blank books, and toys and curios from China and Japan. These last items may help to explain why at least one source (not incidentally the only known photograph of this establishment) refers to Miss Plummer's shop as the "Eastern Exchange Book Rooms."⁴

Whether or not this enterprize qualifies as one of the earliest bona fide book shops in Santa Barbara, the success of Miss

Plummer's pioneer business of lending and selling books cannot be questioned. E.N. Woods in his *Guide to Santa Barbara Town and Country*, published in 1872, recalls that "This is one of the features of the place. Several hundred carefully selected books are collected and new publications are constantly added. Its a pleasant and popular resort among the reading people and is something rarely found in western towns of this size."⁵ In this same publication is an advertisement for Israel Miller "practical watchmaker and jeweler." It was in this jewelry shop that Miss Plummer first opened her successful "Library Rooms."⁶ In July 1874 a selection of books was purchased from Miss Plummer by the Odd Fellows, who in turn later donated their augmented collection to the City of Santa Barbara where it became the core of the Public Library collection. (We will encounter the International Order of Odd Fellows again.)

Sarah Plummer left Santa Barbara in 1880 to accompany her husband, Professor John Gill Lemmon, in his botanical studies. Mr. and Mrs. Lemmon designed an exhibit of the plant life of California for the 1884 New Orleans International Exhibition. In 1902 J.G. Lemmon published *How to tell*

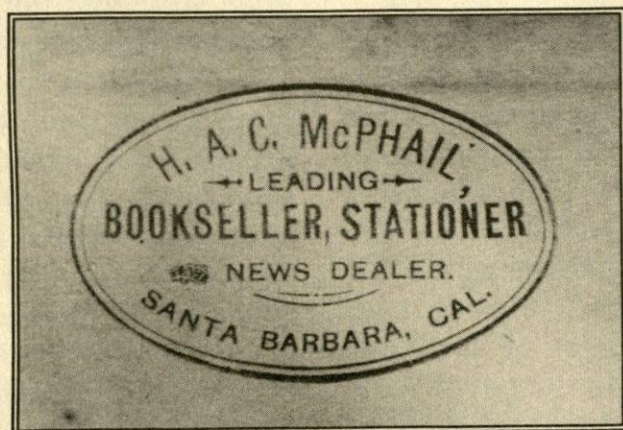
the Trees and Forest Endowment of the Pacific Slope ... and also some elements of forestry by Mrs. Lemmon. That same year *A Record of the Red Cross Work on the Pacific Slope...* was published in Oakland; the preface was signed by Mrs. J. G. Lemmon. Sarah Allen Lemon-Plummer died January 15, 1923.⁷

Following Miss Plummer's pioneer efforts in the early 1870s, we encounter a growing and sometimes transitory group of Santa Barbara merchants identifying themselves as booksellers or stationers:

A. Crane;
J . C .
Hassinger;
H.A.C. McPhail; Murphy (William) and Cook (Isaac Newton); H.W. Muzzall (photographer, appears only once); D.M. Doyle; W.A. Manning (later watchmaker); Albert Rogers (The Little Book Store); Sanborn (C.G.) & Judge (W.A.); Fiske (W.A.) & Johnston (J.T.), later John T. Johnston Stationers; Mrs. M.E. Tuttle.

By 1901, several names had already disappeared from the Santa

Barbara City Directory: W.A. Fiske went on to operate a carriage store; Mrs. Manning was widowed and her daughter, Hattie, briefly ran a combination jewelry shop and news agency. One notable name was added, that of W. W. Osborne. This hardy group of booksellers would be responsible for setting businesses in motion that would serve the Santa Barbara community for many years to come.



Courtesy Clifton F. Smith

H(enry) A.C. McPhail, who had gone into business with J.C. Hassinger around 1877⁸, remained in business at

705 and later 731 State Street from 1886 until 1904, then sold his shop to Mervin C. Faulding (1905-1909). This same address became the Mission Bookstore, managed by one H.L. Osborn; it remained in business until 1915.

James C. Hassinger, after his association with McPhail, purchased a stationery business from C.G. Sanborn in August 1890 and continued on with his particular

1/16/1
2/11/1
3/28/1
5/2/41
6/3/1

blend of books and musical instruments at 1001 State Street until 1900, when he retired. J.C. Hassinger died February 20, 1927. One of Mr. Hassinger's daughters, Attelia Nancy Hassinger, remained a Santa Barbara resident and lived for many years at the family residence at 22 W. Arrellaga. Miss Hassinger died in 1962 at the age of 93.

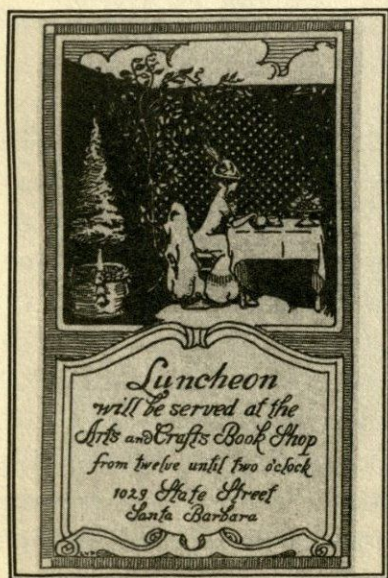
John T. Johnson, having purchased the interest of his partner, **W.A. Fiske**, continued in business at 707 State Street until 1904 when he sold to **C.W. Papst & Son** who operated the business until sometime around 1910, when they in turn sold to **J.M. Barbour**, who named the establishment the **Ramona Book Store**. John Barbour was the proprietor of this shop until his death in the fall of 1916. Mrs. Barbour sold the business the following year to **Fred and Louise Nichols** who brought in partner **Thomas A. Walbridge** around 1919. This arrangement did not last long and in 1920 the **Ramona Book Store** was sold to **Adolphe Levy**, father-in-law of prominent Santa Barbara businessman Michel Levy. Adolphe Levy remained the proprietor of the book shop at this address until 1923, when he moved the business to 1229 State Street, and later to 729 State

Street, where the name was changed to the **Ramona Shop** and the store's emphasis was shifted from books to "notions" and stationery. In 1927 the Ramona Shop was sold to M. Stewart Fullerton, and the business drops from listing as a book or stationery store.

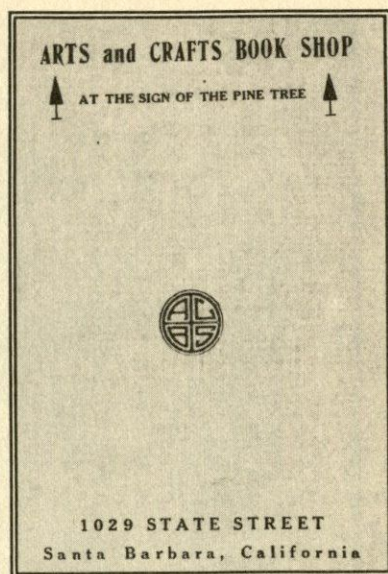
W(ickliffe) W(ines) Osborne moved to Santa Barbara from Indiana in 1897 and opened **Osborne's Book Store** soon thereafter, although the business does not appear in a city directory until 1901. This shop was located at 931 State Street and, after 1908, at 923-25 State Street. It remained open under that name, and at that address, until May 1987. W. W. Osborne died on October 5, 1935, at the age of 83, and was thought at that time to be the oldest man actively in charge of his own business in Santa Barbara. Book shops that outlive their owners are scarce in the extreme.

Another book shop that left a different type of legacy, in this case an employee of the shop, was San Francisco publisher, bookseller and art dealer **Paul Elder**. This short-lived bookshop existed from only 1904-1908. It first opened at 22 Chapala Street, but soon moved to 1203 State Street. The manager of this shop was listed as "**Mrs. Sadie W. Redfield**." After the

death of her husband, Mrs. Redfield had come, with her young daughter Dorothy, to California from Connecticut in 1904. By 1912 Paul Elder's book shop drops from mention, but the same year finds "Saidee" W. Redfield listed as the proprietor of the **Arts and Crafts Book Shop** at 1029 State Street; site of the Orella Adobe and a private residence converted into a book shop and tea room.⁹ This shop was very much in the tradition of Sarah Plummer's library Rooms; it was designed to be a gathering place for the well-heeled as well as the casual passer-by. Besides rare books, limited editions and hand-bound volumes, one could purchase an oil painting by a Califor-

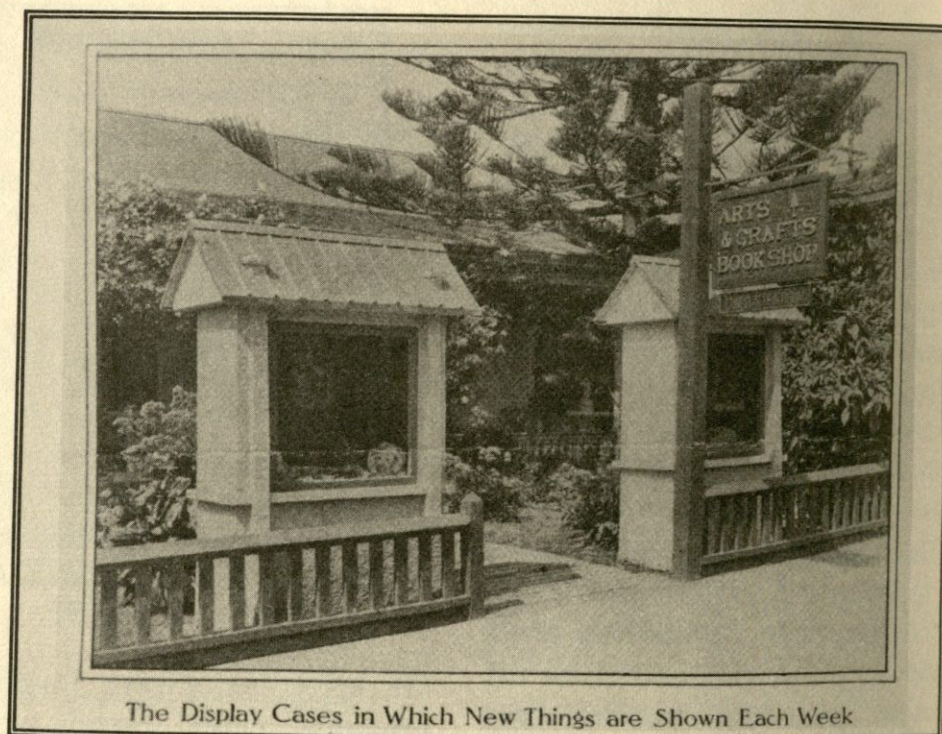


Courtesy Warren Fenzi



Courtesy Warren Fenzi

nia artist, or a rare English or Japanese print. Hand wrought jewelry in the Arts and Crafts style was also available, as well as a choice selection of "American potteries" including "Dedham Crauquele," a beautiful blue-glaze pottery originating from the Massachusetts town of Dedham (still highly valued today), Newcomb pottery made by the women of Newcomb College in New Orleans, and a dark red pottery known as "Redlands" from that California town. There was a garden area where one could have lunch or, later, enjoy afternoon tea. A room dedicated to basketry and books on basketry opened into a children's room stocked with suitable books and "Dolls from every



Arts and Crafts Book Shop, 1029 State Street

land."¹⁰ There was even a rest room where one could do just that. The Arts and Crafts Bookshop drops from the Santa Barbara City Business Directory in 1915. The city directories for 1917-1919 find a Mrs. Eva V.R. Whitcomb Books at this address. Mrs. Whitcomb also drops from listing by 1920.

In 1916 Mrs. Redfield appears as the manager of the **Gift Shop of the Craft-Camarata** at the earlier-mentioned address of 1203 State Street.¹¹ This shop is only listed for the years 1916-17.

Mrs. Redfield next became the manager of the **Adobe Book Shop** at 15 E. Carrillo Street. This shop, in operation from approximately 1923-1927, was the combined effort of F.G. Leonard, Mrs. Fanny B. Browne and Esther B. Hammond. Mrs. Hammond purchased this property, known as the Hill-Carrillo Adobe, in 1917 and retained ownership until 1928 when she sold the property to a man who planned to drastically change the nature of the business and appearance of the historic struc-

ture. A protest followed and the property was sold, without alteration, to Max Fleischmann that same year. Mr. Fleischmann later donated the property to the Santa Barbara Foundation. The Foundation remains at this address today. Failing eyesight forced Mrs. Redfield to retire from the book business in 1927. She died January 27, 1947. Her daughter, Mrs. Cammillo (Dorothy) Fenzi, was for many years manager of the Lobero Theater.

From 1900 to the late 1920s, many other booksellers and stationers emerged and departed in the

same fashion as Paul Elder & Company: **E.P. Connoughton**, 1534 State St.; **A.H. Crowther**, 1031 State St.; **Charles De Hart**, 522 State St.; **Eugene O. Farnum**, 633, 629, 1135 State St.; **L.F. Lamb**, 717 State St.; **Mrs. F.E. Monmonier**, 537 State St.; **E.S. Morris**, 1219 State St.; **Occult Book Shop**, 1206 State St., **Jessie L. Hunt**; **John Prechel**, 633 State St., 1904-1920, (began as a barber, returned to being a barber). Another book shop in this category was owned by **Louis P. Thatcher**



There are Four Large Bookcases in the Main Room

Interior, Arts and Crafts Book Shop. Courtesy Warren Fenzi

and his wife Ethel.

Allan Ottley, long-time head of the California Section of the State Library in Sacramento, recently recalled this shop to Westerner Roger Levenson,

"During the late 1920's, I was a visitor from time to time, and a purchaser even less, to a little book shop on State Street run by a family friend, the Rev. Louis P. Thatcher. My family knew the Thatchers when we lived in British Columbia, and it was largely their enthusiastic encomiums on Santa Barbara's climate (Mrs. Thatcher had lived there for a time with her first husband) that led my mother to induce my father (who had just spent a miserable winter with colds) to sell his general store and head south.

"Thatchers were English, and he had a small pension for service of some kind in World War I, but he needed something more, and so got into the used book business. He learned on the job. It was a time, of course, of economic depression in the county, and I doubt that he made much money at bookselling. Thatchers sometime in the middle 1930's moved back to England."¹²

The Thatchers moved to Santa

Barbara around 1922 and were in business from approximately 1926-1933. During that time Ethel Thatcher worked a succession of different jobs including a confectionery, a department store, a hat shop, and a dry goods store, presumably to keep the business afloat. During the six years that they operated **L.P. Thatcher Books** at 908 1/2 State Street, they lived at four different addresses.

There were, however, other book shops that began during this same period that did quite well; one shop continues in name to the present.

In the historic location of the De la Guerra Adobe (Studios 25-26, later Studio 7), the **Tecolote Book Shop** was established by one Edith Kelley in 1925. This shop offered many sidelines including pottery which may explain why, shortly after the earthquake of June 1925, the business was readily sold to **Roger and Avis Boutell**. The shop was operated by Mr. and Mrs. Boutell and their son **Clarence** until the later left for New York around 1931 to work for publisher Alfred A. Knopf; he later served as book review editor for the *New York Post*.

Another son, Henry S. Boutell, was responsible for *First Editions of Today and How to Tell Them*, a pub-

lication that has gone through several subsequent editions (one edited by his father) and is still considered the standard reference work on the subject. Henry Boutell died in England in 1933 at the age of twenty-eight while studying at the British Museum.

Roger Boutell Jr. gained experience in the book trade first by working as a clerk in his father's book shop, and later as an employee of the Los Angeles News Company (book distributors). In 1944 he was drafted. Upon his return in 1945, he assumed control of the family business, and with his wife **Zella**, ran the shop "through some hard times when the employees sometimes made more than the owners."¹³

In 1954 the business was sold to **Mr. and Mrs. William Tilghman**, owners of the **Montecito Bookshop**, and **Mr. and Mrs. John Boit Morse**. These four people formed a partnership and ran both stores under the name **Tecolote Book Shops**. The business was owned for a time by **James Maher**, who sold it to **Mr. and Mrs. William Watling** in 1963. In 1970 the two shops were sold to **William M. Robbins** and his wife **Laura**. They closed the De la Guerra location, but continued the operation in Montecito Village.¹⁴ In 1979 the

bookshop was sold to **Gary and Kathy Mullins**, owners of **The Book Loft** in Solvang. They in turn sold the Tecolote Book Shop to **Harry Sims** of Santa Barbara in August 1985. In May 1990 Harry Sims sold the Montecito store to **Margaret Dent**, the present owner.

TECOLOTE BOOKSHOP

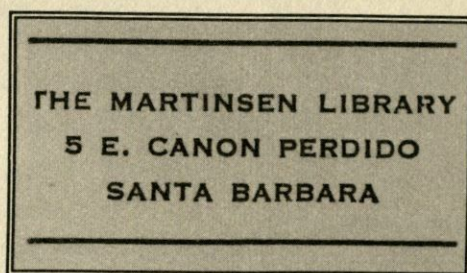
**De la Guerra Studios
Santa Barbara**

The **Western Book and Toy Shop**, owned and operated by **Miss Dora Bowen** and **Mrs. M. B. Haines** was located at 1213 State Street, 816 State Street and, for a most of the time, at 1027 State Street. This book and toy shop was in business from 1911-1938.

The success of book stores such as **Tecolote**, **Osborne's** and the soon to be described **Book Den**, belie how very difficult it was for booksellers, as part of the larger business community in the United States, to survive in the late 1920s and early 1930s. One destructive, although not particularly new, aspect of bookselling was again entering the market place; price undercutting. Then, as now, the bookseller's profit

margin was not large and this manner of competition was having a particularly deleterious effect on the book trade nationally. For this and other reasons many booksellers, both new and used, were returning to the age-old practice of lending or renting books. Tecolote Books, soon after opening, identified itself as a lending library. Other business were conducted exclusively as lending libraries. In Santa Barbara these were: **The Book Shelf**, 1114 State St., **Ethel S. Brown**; **The Book Stall**, 9 E. Anapamu St., **Mrs. Mignon Hollingsworth**; **Mrs. Fanny Brown-Browne**, 1350 Coast Highway, Montecito; **Martinsen Library**, 5 E. Canon Perdido St., **George and Louise Wagner**; **Presidio Library** 806 Anacapa St., **Daphne Cox** and **Lucille Duff**.

Despite these threatening circumstances, several book stores opened their doors in Santa Barbara in 1933: **W.J. Ervin**, 619 State St.; **R.C. Redman**, 17 E. Carrillo, and **The Book Den**, 15 E. Anapamu St. The following history concerns the only book store from this group that managed to survive.

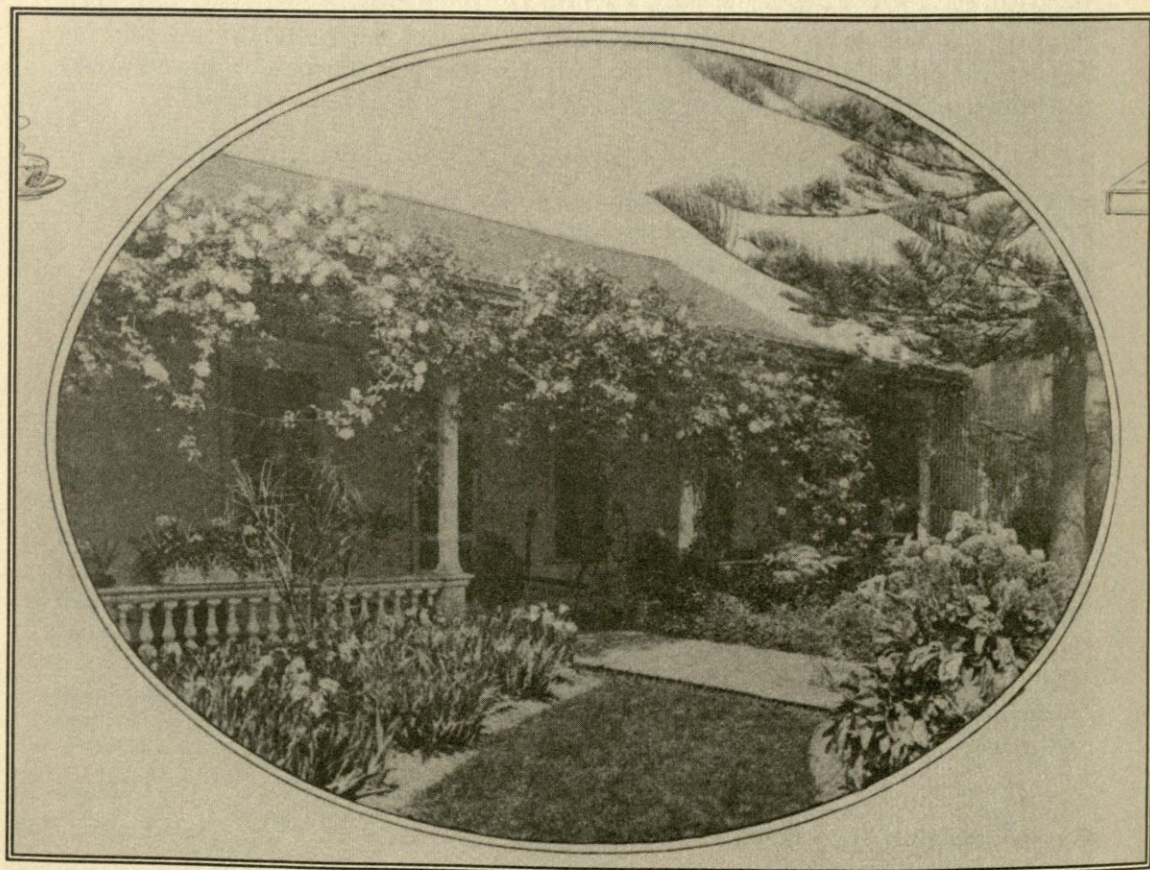


NOTES

1. *Santa Barbara Press*, July 9, 1870 (3-1). Later issues rejoiced at their mistake.
2. This census, conducted in August and September 1870, finds Miss Plummer with "no occupation."
3. Stella Haverland Rouse, "Olden Days: Area's First Librarian, Miss Sarah Plummer." *Santa Barbara News-Press*, January 23, 1972.
4. The image described is offered by Berkeley bookseller Sarkis Shamvonian as "Earliest Known Photograph of A Bookshop Interior in California." The photograph was taken by Santa Barbara photographer W.N. Tuttle c.1871. A two line ink inscription along the card base reads, "Inside view of Eastern Exchange Book Rooms / Santa Barbara, Cal."

5. Woods, p. 15.
6. The location of Miss Plummer's rooms is never specified in her newspaper advertisements, since this would be obvious to any Santa Barbara resident. Owen O'Neill in his *History of Santa Barbara County* (Santa Barbara: Harold McLean Meier, 1939) states on page 236 that, "In March the books arrived; Miss Plummer arranged her library shelves in the jewelry store of Israel Miller on State Street... ." On the following page O'Neill notes, "The first reading room of the Odd Fellows Public Library was in the rear of A.W. Froom's store." No confirmation of this second statement could be found.
7. Stella Haverland Rouse, "Olden Days: Hardships of Travel in 1880s Related." *Santa Barbara News-Press*, February 6, 1972.
8. From the *Santa Barbara Morning Press* for July 18, 1890, "Having Purchased Mr. J.C. Hassinger's interest in the book and stationery business, I hereby tender my sincere thanks to the public for the liberal patronage during the past thirteen years and would respectfully solicit a continuance of the same in the future. H.A.C. McPhail"
9. The Santa Barbara City Directory for 1913-14 lists 1029 State Street as the home address for Mrs. Redfield and her daughter Dorothy. What is not clear is whether Mrs. Redfield was the owner of this property (and thus proprietor of the shop) or the manager. An article on this shop entitled, "A Home, a shop, and a Tea-Room" appeared in the *Ladies' Home Journal* for April 1914, did not indicate who owned the book shop or where it was located.
10. From a pamphlet available to visitors of the shop. Now in the collection of Mr. Warren Fenzi of Santa Barbara.
11. This sequence of addresses and bookstores is made all the more confusing by Ruth Gordon's study "Paul Elder: bookseller-publisher (1897-1917): a Bay Area reflection," an unpublished Masters Thesis - - University of California, Berkeley, 1977. Ms. Gordon states, "The general book department [in San Francisco] was in the care of **Percival C. Mills**, who also managed the **Santa Barbara Arts and Crafts Book Store** a small branch of the business." Elder's exact relationship with this shop is unclear, and no trace of Percival Mills can be found in Santa Barbara directories for the years mentioned; it must be assumed that if he did manage this shop, he did so from San Francisco.
12. Letter dated July 16, 1990.
13. Telephone conversation with Mr. Boutell on September 25, 1990.

14 . During this period (1975-1978), there were also branches of Tecolote Book Shop in La Cumbre Plaza and Scottsdale, Arizona. The De la Guerra location was vacant only a few months before it was occupied by another bookseller, **Mahri Kerley**, in June 1978. This new shop was named, alternately, **Chaucer's Book Shop** and **Chaucer & Company** (after Sylvia Beach's Paris bookshop, **Shakespeare and Company**). Unfortunately, this shop remained open only until September 1979 when the stock was removed to a second shop of the same name (but earlier known as the **Ark Book Shop**) in the Five Points Shopping Center where it remains in business today.



Exterior, Adobe Book Shop. Courtesy Warren Fenzi

A History of the Book Den

by Eric Kelley

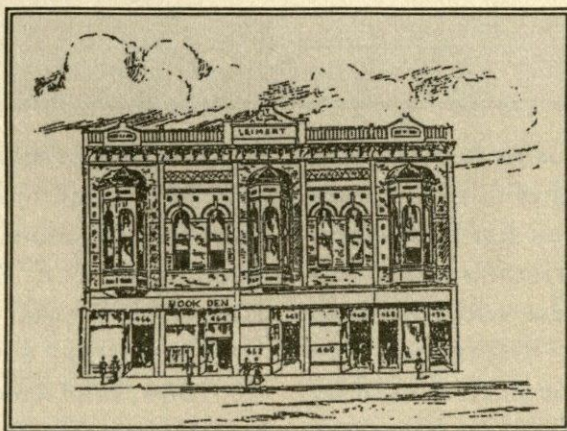
S ometime in 1902, two brothers, Ernest and Thomas Angel, opened a book store at 1257 Broadway in Oakland. They may not have been cut out for this line of work; the year before Ernest had worked for an insurance company and he would eventually become a book keeper. In 1904 the Brothers Angel moved their store four

blocks down Broadway to 464 Eighth Street, and by 1905 they were out of business. Not a very auspicious start for what would become one of the oldest book stores in California.

Fortunately, the store was taken over that same year by Clarence Fellows Rowell, who had somewhat better credentials for bookselling. He was a recent graduate of the University of California

where his father, Joseph Cummings Rowell, was University Librarian (1875 -1919) and Archivist and Librarian Emeritus (1919-1938). Clarence's brother, T. Ar-

thur Rowell, also tried his hand at bookselling, opening a shop the same year in Oakland on San Pablo Avenue. That shop didn't survive long, but Clarence Fellows Rowell ran his

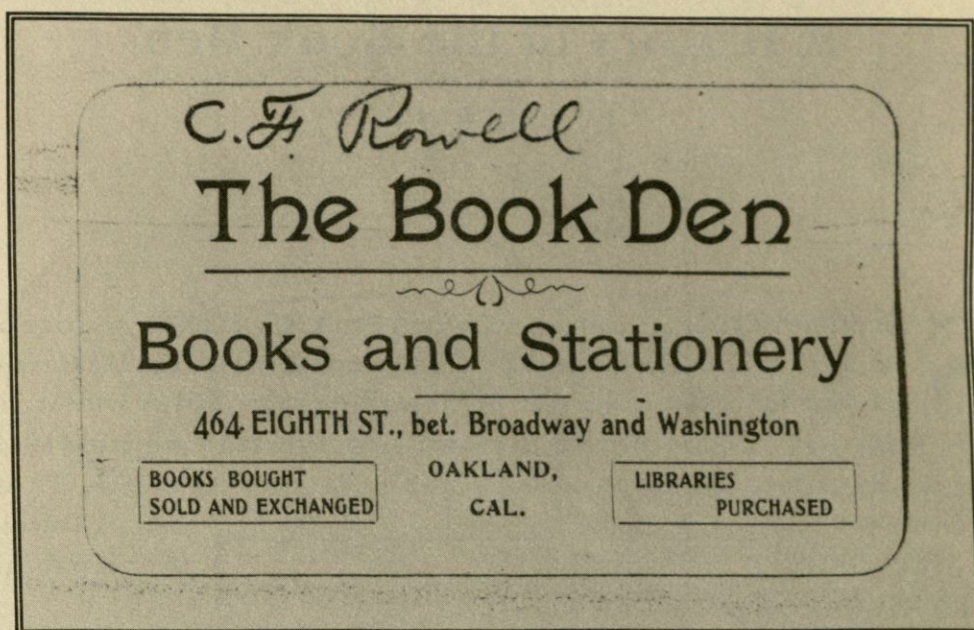


464 8th Street, Oakland

store on Eighth Street for another twenty-one years.

The Eighth Street store was located in the Leimert Building, a handsome Victorian commercial structure with three bay windows built in 1876. The building still stands, having been recently remodeled. An Ethiopian restaurant occupies 464 Eighth Street today.

There is no record of when the name of the Book Den was first



applied to the business. Unfortunately, the Oakland City Directories for this period list businesses only by the proprietor's name and the city's business records have long since been discarded. The name may have been first used by the Angel brothers or by Rowell at a later date. We do know, however, that in the 1916 University of California Alumni Directory, Clarence Rowell is listed as the proprietor of "The Book Den." A single business card from The Book Den, now in the Edward C. Kemble Collections of the California Historical Society, contains the name C. F. Rowell written across the top in pencil.

C. F. Rowell died on December 18, 1926, a relatively young man

in his early forties. In early 1927, the Book Den was purchased by one Max Clemens Richter, son of prominent San Francisco physician C.M. Richter.

Max Richter was born on March 11, 1884. Like Rowell, he attended the University of California, receiving both bachelor's and master of science degrees in agriculture, specializing in apiary. After graduation, he had been a bee keeper in various locations in California's central valley, in Monterey and also, for a number of years, in Chile. In an oral history interview recorded on March 17-18, 1955, and only recently unearthed by the diligent efforts of Santa Barbara Historical Society librarian Michael Redmon, Richter discuss-

es the decision to get out of bee-keeping due to the strenuous nature of the work and to buy an antiquarian book shop in Oakland whose owner had recently died. He goes on to say that he went into the book business "without knowing a thing about it."

Richter had not studied English literature in either high school or college, and was not even familiar with such contemporary authors as Marie Corelli, Rider Haggard, or Edgar Rice Burroughs. But he learned to stock what the public desired. Among other things, he found a surprisingly large interest in books on the occult. I remember coming to the same realization when I purchased the Book Den some fifty-two years later.

Richter operated the store in Oakland until 1933 when the decision was made to move to Santa Barbara. His family had long owned extensive property in the Mission Canyon area, totalling at one time more than 275 acres. The Santa Barbara Botanical Gardens presently occupy a portion of the land owned by Dr. Richter. Prior to going to Chile, Max Richter had also kept bees in Santa Barbara.

In the recording held by the Santa Barbara Historical Society, he discusses the move from Oak-

land.

"I made a trip down there, getting in at Santa Barbara very early in the morning, and walking up State Street, looking at the places for rent. This was in 1932, the latter part. Coming up as far as Anapamu and State, I saw very little rentals of the size necessary for the antiquarian book business. But at Anapamu, east, there was the Odd Fellows hall and there was a good sized place for rent. This was between the post office and the library, which was a very good location. And I made arrangements with the Odd Fellows that very day to rent the place.

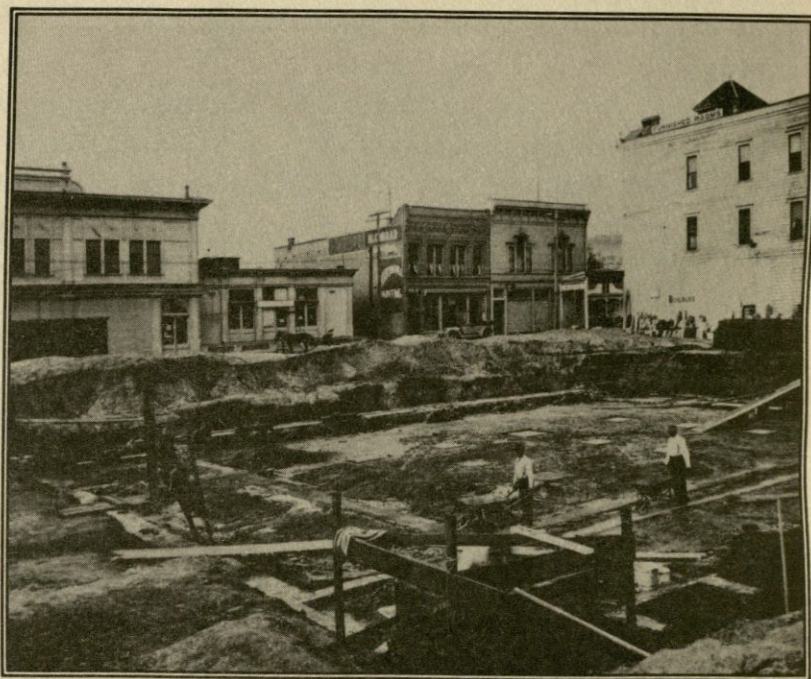
"I returned to Oakland and got about five or six hundred pounds of strong cord, and tied up fifteen tons of books and magazines, which were placed on a large truck and trailer. And they arrived in Santa Barbara just a week before the Hoover bank holidays."

The new home of The Book Den was the ground floor of the Odd Fellows Hall at 15 East Anapamu Street. A photograph of the building taken just after the 1925 earthquake, when Schauer Printing was at that location, shows it to be a typical wooden-

sided commercial building. A false adobe front was later added, with curved wings descending along each side of the front facade. These were removed when the building was completely remodeled in 1985-86. At that time the entire structure was stuccoed over, a

much more formal Spanish appearance was created.

The location across from the library and post office was a good one. In 1937 the post office moved to its present location on Anacapa Street and the building soon became the new Museum of Art. The post office had obviously a good traffic builder, and the library and art museum continued to bring people with an interest in reading and culture to the area. When I came to Santa Barbara, I was lucky enough to be introduced to author and critic Kenneth Rexroth, who lived in Montecito. He recounted



*Odd Fellows Hall, center, during construction of new post office, 1914.
Courtesy Santa Barbara Historical Society*

how, when he first moved to Santa Barbara, he had been tempted by the idea of opening a book store, much as Lawrence Ferlinghetti had done in San Francisco with City Lights. Rexroth thought that a location near the library would be ideal, but finding the Book Den already there, he abandoned his plans. One can only guess how the literary history of Santa Barbara might have changed with a Kenneth Rexroth book store in town.

The *Santa Barbara News-Press* for February 19, 1933, contained an article announcing the opening of the Book Den. It described the

stock as comprising "volumes treating with all branches of literature, science, first editions, books on philosophy, sociology, natural sciences, art, fiction, and in addition there will be a large stock of magazines, giving patrons a place where back issues of magazines may be secured."

In his recorded interview, Richter jokes about opening a store in Santa Barbara one week before Hoover's bank holiday. Times were indeed not good. There were few other book stores in town, the most notable being Osborne's, which had been around since the late 1890s, and Tecolote Book Shop in the De la Guerra Adobe, which was owned by Roger Boutell. In a memoir published in the *Quarterly News-Letter* of the Book Club of California for Spring 1948, he writes about his own store surviving "the rather grim thirties."

There were also a few rental libraries in town, and many of the Book Den's early customers didn't realize the books were for sale. For a time, the Book Den survived on the income of renting books as well as selling them. Sales were sometimes as low as a dollar a day. Then, as now, the store would special order new books and search for out-of-print titles. But

the store's rent was then only sixty dollars a month and, given his family's extensive real estate holdings, one gets the feeling Max Richter didn't need to live off the profits of the Book Den.

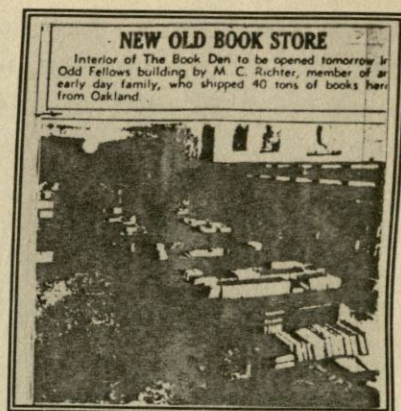
But the store survived, serving such prominent local history collectors as Louise Peck and Rosario Curletti, and customers from farther afield, such as Donald Cuiross Peattie, Vincent Price and Barry Fitzgerald. During the fifties, William Saroyan often crossed over from the library, pausing to look at the books in the "ten cent" rack at the front of the store. Considerable trade was done with John Howell - Books of San Francisco, and with Edwin Grabhorn of the Grabhorn Press.

The constant struggle to acquire books was helped in large measure by Richter's friendship with a Mrs. Dalbeck, who was the most important appraiser in Santa Barbara at the time. She always used Max Richter to appraise books in estates, and this connection enabled him to buy many libraries.

Of course, buying also has its dangers, as other book dealers are not above using a little creative merchandising to get a better price for their merchandise. Max Richter recounted a story of visit-

ing a second-hand dealer on Chapala Street to look at a set of the Cliff Collection of California Lithographs the man had recently acquired. While Richter was there, the dealer received a call from Dawson's, a Los Angeles dealer who was also interested in the prints. The second-hand dealer turned down Richter's first offer, saying that Dawson's had offered more. Richter eventually purchased the prints for five hundred dollars. He learned a year later, from a New York dealer, that the phone conversation had been a fake. There had been no call from Dawson's, merely an attempt to get a higher offer from Richter. The prints eventually sold to the California Historical Society, where they remain today.

In the years prior to the U.S. entry into the Second World War, Richter prided himself in acquiring books on the international scene whose views were unpopular enough that the authors had trouble finding American publishers. This included buying foreign editions, as well as acquiring copies from print runs of U.S. publishers which had been recalled. This role of bookseller as champion of intellectual freedom has lessons for us today as attempts at censorship increase around the country.



February 19, 1933

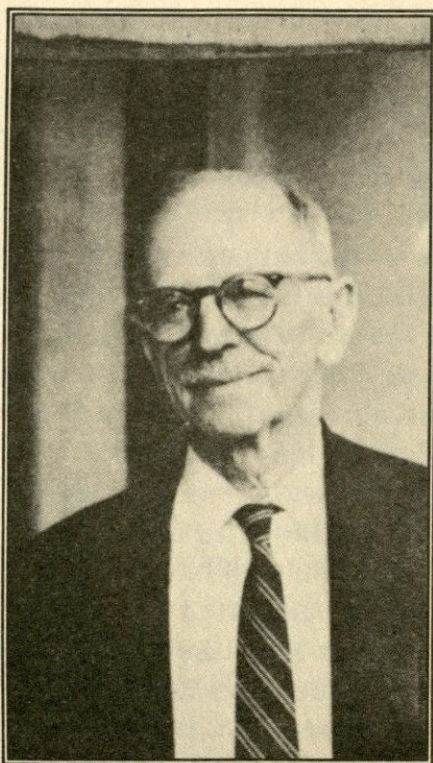
The part antiquarian booksellers play in discovering and preserving history is also evident in Richter's recorded interview. He discusses making the rounds of the second-hand shops and thrift shops to find books that he could resell. Booksellers do the same today. But the point Richter makes is that he often found useful and important works which would never have found their proper end purchaser if a knowledgeable bookseller had not removed them from the dross of the thrift shop and made them available to an informed audience of readers.

A specific case illustrates this point. Richter was buying books from a woman in town. After going through what books she had to offer, he asked if she had anything else to sell. She replied that in the next room was a pile of papers

that were going to the dump. Among the trash, Richter found a copy of the first pamphlet to be printed in Montana. The pamphlet was purchased for five dollars and eventually sold for thirty-five.

Like many bookmen, Max Richter had his own collecting passion. Over the years he amassed a large collection on cacti and succulents. He bought at auction and through *AB Bookman's Weekly*. He also added two substantial collections to his own, those of the American editor Scott Haselton and the French editor, P. Montandon. His daughter-in-law remembers that one Christmas, Max insisted on keeping the living room clear for a large shipment of books on cacti coming from France (presumably the Montandon collection). Although he had paid thousands for the library, it arrived in only three boxes. Apparently the quality was such that he was still happy with his purchase. He eventually gave the collection to the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, Arizona, and the Richter Memorial Library was named for him on April 26, 1970.

Customers recall that in Max Richter's later years, it was usually Max's son, Richard, or long-time employee Helen Nelson, with



Max Clemens Richter
Courtesy Desert Botanical Garden

whom one dealt. Richard worked in the Book Den for more than twenty years; beginning when he was twenty-four. But Max Richter still kept a very tight rein on the business and never did delegate much responsibility or authority.

Max Richter died on April 14, 1973 at the age of 89. His son sold the business the following year.

The purchasers of the Book Den were Richard and Susan Phelps; he from New England, she from Southern California. They had owned a country store in New

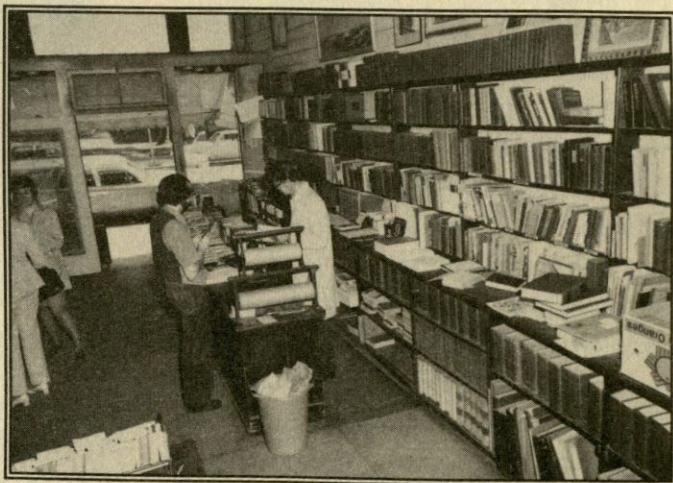
England and a telephone answering service. Both of these businesses had failed, but failure is often a great teacher. They would have better luck with the Book Den.

As often happens to a business late in the life of the proprietor, the Book Den had become run down. The stock was poor and sales were approximately \$30,000 a year. A photo taken in 1974 shows the store looking almost exactly as it did in 1933. The shelving consisted of seven-foot-high shelves around the parameter of the store and three five-foot-high bookcases at the back of the store. The bulk of the space was taken up by tables which, while being able to display things nicely, didn't hold much merchandise.

The Phelps made several changes immediately. They added shelves to the three existing bookcases and added another three large bookcases to the center of the shop. This increased stock capacity considerably. And most importantly, they added new lighting. Until then, the store had been

lit by four incandescent lamps hanging from the ceiling, running the length of the store. The edges of the store, where all the bookshelves stood, were practically dark. Susan Phelps notes that just adding the lighting increased sales immensely.

Unlike Max Richter, who rarely delegated any responsibility, the Phelps hired managers to look af-



Richard (far right) and Susan Phelps

ter things, while they traveled extensively, buying for the shop. The inventory improved in both quality and quantity, and sales improved as well.

A few years later, the Phelps started a second Book Den in Martha's Vineyard. The Book Den East is located in a barn behind a large Victorian House. Given the

seasonal nature of business on the island - no one comes during the winter - the Phelps found it possible to split their year, spending summers on the East Coast and Winters in Santa Barbara.

In 1978, the Santa Barbara store was expanded into the storefront next door, giving more room to display back issues of magazines. Note cards were added as a sideline. By 1979, sales had quadrupled and the decision was made to sell the store to concentrate efforts on the Martha's Vineyard store. Yet another Book Den was started, the Book Den South in Fort Myers, Florida. The Book Den East was sold and continues in business. I sometimes wonder what people think when they see "Books Wanted" advertisements in *AB Bookman's Weekly* for all three Book Dens.

In 1979 my partner and I bought the Book Den. My partner, Michael Isador, was a concert pianist suffering from burn-out. I had been working for Brentano's, a chain bookstore outlet on the site of the old Paul Elder Bookstore in San Francisco. We were introduced by a bookseller in Marin County who knew we were both interested in buying or starting a book store.

Having looked at many new

book stores for sale in the San Francisco Bay Area, and at many possible locations for starting a new store, we were unable to find a situation that worked. Michael joked that, given half an hour with a calculator, I could prove that any business wouldn't work.

Much as Paul Elder had at the beginning of the century, we looked south to Santa Barbara. And on my twenty-seventh birthday, we came across the Book Den. With this store I couldn't show that it wouldn't work, so we bought it. The fact that it was a used book store, not a new store, didn't stop us. Neither did the fact that neither of us knew a thing about used books.

We had lots to learn. My experience with new books, while useful, touched on only a small part of what is necessary to run a large general used book store. Heeding the advice of "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," we made very few changes in our early years.

At the beginning of 1984, I bought my partner's share in the business. The next year, the building was extensively remodeled. To cope with rising rents, I let the "new" side of the store go. By remodeling what had been a storage room, the store now had a "rare book room" to replace the

lost store front. Selling space was actually much the same as before the renovation, and new shelves actually increased the store's capacity. Throughout all the changes, I endeavored to improve things without changing the store's basic character. I took it as quite a compliment when a customer said, "It's the same, only better."

Why has the Book Den managed to survive for so long? Its eighty-eight year history makes it one of the oldest surviving stores in California. Luck certainly has something to do with it. At crucial times the store has found new blood. This has enabled it to survive the death of two proprietors and to find new energy and ideas with the new owners. We've also been very lucky with our landlords. At a time when the very existence of a business is threatened every time the lease expires, the Book Den managed to survive its first fifty years in Santa Barbara renting month-to-month from the International Order of Odd Fellows. The rent was sixty dollars a month in 1933. By 1974 it had risen to all of \$150. Five years later it was \$750, but even the current monthly rate of almost \$2,000 is reasonable by prevailing standards.

But probably the most basic

reason for the Book Den's success is that it never strayed from the basic business of providing the public with good books at reasonable prices. Books may not appear to be the most necessary of commodities, but a society cannot long survive without some method of transmitting the thoughts, knowledge and imagination of one person to many, and books remain the most efficient method ever devised for doing this.

The Book Den has been fortunate to have a succession of bright and talented people working there, both owners and employees. The magic of books often attracts people who are willing to sacrifice monetary success for the privilege of working with books. To quote Roger Boutell:

"The twenty years I spent selling books were rewarding, and I am sorry I did not start earlier in my life. Few people can hope for great financial rewards from bookselling, but having done various other things, I can think of few vocations more absorbing and at the same time entertaining."

My sentiments exactly.

A Roundup of Speakers

1989

Jan 5	Dr. C. Seybert Kinsell	The Golden Years of Postcards	University Club
Feb 2	Randolph Karr	Some of the Early Railroads in Southern California	Santa Barbara Club
Mar 2	Richard Oglesby	Promises, Promises	University Club
Apr 6	J. Robert Haller, Ph.D.	Four Seasons in California	Santa Barbara Club
May 4	Kathi Brewster	A Salute to Santa Barbara Women	University Club
June 1	George Koenig	The Death Valley Party of 1849-50	Santa Barbara Historical Museum
Jul 16	David Griggs	Carpinteria Valley Museum of History	
Sep 7	Gregory S. Sanders	Translocation of Sea Otters and Changing Political Attitudes	University Club
Oct 8	Annual Fall Barbecue	Rancho San Julian	
Nov 2	Dr. Norton B. Stern	Pioneer Jews of Santa Barbara	University Club
Dec 7	Hugh C. Tolford	The Last Great Bonanza	Birnam Wood Golf Club

1990

Jan 4	Norman Neuerburg	Henry Chapman Ford in Santa Barbara	
Feb 1	Richard E. Erwin	The Truth About Wyatt Earp	University Club
Mar 1	Judith P. Triem	Architectural Images of Ventura County 1780-1930	University Club
Apr 5	Neal P. Graffy	The History of the Flying A Studio	University Club
May 29	E.R. Jim Blakley	Spring Roundup & Bar-B-Cue at Zaca Lake	
Jun 7	David Myrick	Railroads of Southern California and Their Transcontinental Connections	Santa Barbara Club
Jul 5	Kathleen Brewster	Santa Barbara's Historic Adobes	University Club
Sept	William F. Luton, Jr.	Mammy Pleasant and The Bells	Santa Barbara Historical Museum
Oct 7		Annual Fall Barbecue	Rancho San Julian
Nov 4	Jonathan Brown	Tropical Fruit & the Rincon Creek	Carpinteria
Dec 6	David Lavender	Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce Indians	Birnam Wood Golf Club